



S-T Photo by Rick Choate

Nathaniel 'Hank' and Mary Hankins hold the Charles T. Hardt Peace With Justice Award they received from the Southwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Churches for their numerous volunteer efforts.

Hardt Award puts spotlight on selfless couple's activities

By JENNY STRASBURG
Staff Writer

Perhaps it's because they'd never toot their own horns that Mary and Nathaniel "Hank" Hankins are so deserving of the prestigious peace award they now hold.

Coupled, of course, with the fact that one or both of them run the Daily Bread Soup Kitchen at Wesley United Methodist Church, teach Sunday school and Bible classes, coordinate scholarship committees, lead men's and women's groups, volunteer with the American Red Cross, conduct family ministries and have served on directors' boards for — among others — the Fort Concho Historic Landmark, the Concho Valley Regional Food Bank and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The list of positions they've held at Wesley since they began attending the church in 1976 numbers in the dozens.

The Hankinses retired about two years ago, but they spend very little time sitting around.

Those contributions and twice as many more led to the Hankinses' unanimous selection by the Southwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Churches for the Charles T. Hardt Peace With Justice Award.

The award was established in 1980 by Charles and Rudy Hardt, who continuously strived to promote the cause of peace within the Southwest Texas Conference and all around the world.

Bishop Raymond Owen presented the award before a standing ovation of 1,500-

plus conference-goers in June in Corpus Christi. The Hardt Award is the biggest in the conference.

Tireless Giving

The best way to learn what the Hankinses are all about is to talk to the people who work with them every day.

"They do things, and they don't even think about (the fact that) they could be up for an award, or that they're going to be in the paper or anything," said one woman who works regularly at the Daily Bread, the soup kitchen at Wesley that serves more than 12,000 meals every year.

"They're just like little kids when it happens," the woman continued, speaking of the Hankinses' reaction to recognition.

Like the couple, fellow volunteers shun publicity. The woman asked to be called "someone who works with them often." She works mostly with Mrs. Hankins, who has coordinated the soup kitchen since 1987.

Mr. Hankins fills in at the kitchen when he is needed. Otherwise, the couple's days are filled with a long list of other obligations.

Asked what she believes is the driving force behind Mary Hankins' ongoing service, the woman answered, "She's just that kind of person. She likes to see things happen, and she wants to be a part of it.

"It just gives her energy."

Dr. J. Gordon Talk, superintendent of the San Angelo District of Methodist Churches, wrote the Hankinses' nomination letter on behalf of the district.

"I know of no one in the conference,"

Talk wrote, "who has labored more diligently and with greater integrity, both in the church and in the secular society, for peace with justice."

Continuous Caring

The Hankinses said they grew up with a sense of obligation to community.

Carrying that into their later years, they said, was a natural continuation.

Mrs. Hankins said her parents always welcomed people into their house, always instilled a sense of giving.

"I've always been involved," she explained, "even growing up. I always wanted to be involved in this, or, 'Let me do that.'"

"Especially when we had children, we wanted to be involved."

The Hankinses met in high school in Palatka, Fla. They've been married 36 years and have a son and grandson living in Irving; their daughter died in an automobile accident in 1981.

They lived all over during the 20 years Mr. Hankins served in the Air Force. And they both also worked in the civilian sector, Mrs. Hankins at GTE and Mr. Hankins at Ethicon Inc.

They retired within a month of each other at the beginning of 1991.

But with all the hats they wear now, they say they're just as busy as when they both "worked" — that is, for money.

"It seems kind of ridiculous," Mr. Hankins said good-naturedly. "But I guess I wouldn't be satisfied with living any other way.

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